

largest VA facility in the continental United States. The land was generously donated after the Civil War to serve as an old soldiers home and I am pleased that efforts are finally under way to move toward this goal with plans for a State Veterans Home on the property. We must continue, however, to expand other services and programs to meet veterans' needs. I remain deeply opposed to the VA's consideration of plans to divert portions of the property for commercial use. I am determined to continue working with local veterans groups, local officials, and the surrounding community to ensure that the entire property is preserved for programs that benefit and serve our veterans.

The sanctity of our battlefields, monuments, and veterans institutions is of utmost importance to preserve military history and pay respect to those who fought. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the efforts of my constituent Leon Cooper, a World War II veteran of the Pacific Theater, who has been working to raise awareness about the build-up of garbage and refuse at the site of the Battle of Red Beach on Tarawa Atoll in the remote island nation of Kiribati. Nearly 1,000 Marines were killed and over 2,000 were wounded during heavy fighting over the span of just a few days in November 1943. I applaud Mr. COOPER for his commitment.

Although Tarawa has a monument to the Marines who died on Red Beach, heavy construction in the area has spurred an effort to find a new location closer to the battle site itself. I fully support this effort, which would also create an opportunity for the 2nd Marine division to restore the beach to a more appropriate and respectable condition. I encourage our local U.S. Embassy in Fiji to work with the Government of Kiribati on sanitation and conservation projects that would provide long-term solutions for maintaining the coastline and preserving the area. It would be a tribute to our veterans and a benefit to the Kiribati people.

And while we honor generations past, we must also be keenly aware of the needs of soldiers now deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is unacceptable that returning veterans are facing unreasonable delays obtaining care and benefits. The number of new enrollees waiting for their first appointment at the VA has doubled in the past year. I am deeply concerned about the inadequate screening and services for the more than 1/3 of returning troops who seek mental health care. It is imperative that we fight the budget cuts and misplaced priorities that have led to this deplorable situation.

As we observe Memorial Day, let us give thanks to all of our brave men and women who have stood in harm's way or stand there today, far from home, living at great risk, and fighting under the stars and stripes. We owe them an enduring debt of gratitude.

#### FEDERAL TELEPHONE EXCISE TAX

**HON. MICHAEL G. FITZPATRICK**

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, May 25, 2006*

Mr. FITZPATRICK of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to say good riddance to an outdated, antiquated tax that has long outlived its usefulness—the long distance telephone tax. This tax is known to many Ameri-

cans only as another indiscernible line on their phone bill which reads as an access fee or charge for service.

But in fact, this tax began as part of the War Revenue Act of 1898 as a temporary means to finance the Spanish American War. Interestingly, this wasn't the only onerous tax in the War Revenue Act. The Act also gave us the much debated estate tax.

Back then, the excise tax was designed to be a luxury tax for people who owned telephones. Today, the war is ancient history and if you ask anyone walking down the street to join you in shouting "Remember the Maine," I'd expect you to get quizzical stares. Today, there is no specific purpose for this tax. Telephones are a virtual necessity—not a luxury—and the revenues collected by this tax flow into the general fund. But this once temporary tax remains and costs American taxpayers, our small businesses and families almost \$6 billion dollars a year.

On the tax, Gene Kimmelman, director of Consumers Union is quoted as saying, "this is the poster child for how messed up our telephone pricing system is today. It makes no sense to have to pay a tax to fight a war that was over more than 100 years ago." Well today the tax has been repealed.

Americans will soon be able to file for a refund as part of their 2006 tax return for the past three years of charges and the Treasury Department estimates that \$15 billion will be refunded to the American public.

I encourage all Americans to take advantage of this opportunity to get their returns and I call on my colleagues to set their sights on ending this tax's equally unnecessary counterpart, the local telephone excise tax. These are outdated, out-of-touch taxes and they should all be removed from the tax code.

#### COMMEND KIMBERLY BURNITZ FOR HER PARTICIPATION IN THE P3: PEOPLE, PROSPERITY, AND THE PLANET STUDENT DESIGN COMPETITION

**HON. JUDY BIGGERT**

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, May 25, 2006*

Mrs. BIGGERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to applaud the efforts of Kimberly Burnitz, and college student from Lockport, Illinois. Earlier this month, Kimberly and her team from Eastern Illinois University, came to Washington to compete in the P3—People, Prosperity, and the Planet—Student Design Competition.

Sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency, the P3 design competition gives college-level students a chance to grow their technical and scientific skills by working on projects that address sustainability challenges faced by the developing world. After reviewing over one hundred proposals, the EPA provided grants to 41 of the most promising student projects that addressed these challenges while preserving the environment.

Among the teams chosen to develop their project, the students of Eastern Illinois University worked on a unique initiative to increase drinking water supplies in rural Haiti and other developing nations. Through extensive research and testing, Kimberly's team devised locally feasible methods for Haitians to im-

prove water cistern designs and repair cistern cracks.

While not among the final winners of the contest, their innovative project truly embodied the objectives of the competition—to find environmentally friendly ways to raise living standards and foster economic growth in the developing world.

Mr. Speaker, these are goals we can all agree on. Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I thank Kimberly for all her hard work, congratulate her team on their success, and wish them great success in all of their future endeavors.

#### URGING THE SENATE TO PASS THE STEM CELL RESEARCH ENHANCEMENT ACT

**HON. JANE HARMAN**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, May 25, 2006*

Ms. HARMAN. Mr. Speaker, one year ago the House passed the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, by a vote of 238-194. I was pleased to see this Chamber put science before ideology. The promise of finding cures for a whole host of debilitating diseases seemed bright.

But the year has come and gone, and the Senate has yet to take up its version of the legislation. Further delay is unacceptable. Today, I join my colleagues in the House to urge the Senate to schedule a vote on this critical, life-saving, and life-affirming measure.

This bill takes an ethical and moral approach to a challenging subject while respecting the value of life. It allows for federal funds to support research on stem cell lines derived from the surplus embryos of fertility treatments. Fertility clinics do not need these embryos and they would otherwise be discarded, not implanted. It requires explicit written donor consent, and it does not allow stem cells to be sold for profit.

Many Members of Congress like to talk about "values." Today, I say to them: using discarded embryos to find life-saving cures is our moral obligation. Saving lives is precisely what we should all care about.

Parkinson's disease, cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's, spinal cord injuries, and juvenile diabetes do not discriminate—every one of us has had a family member or friend whose life has been changed by one of these debilitating conditions. This is not and should not be a partisan or ideological issue. People from both ends of the political spectrum—from Nancy Reagan to the late Christopher Reeve—have embraced the promise of stem cell research. It is my hope that the United States Senate will follow their lead.

Cures for many serious ailments may lie in stem cell research. We owe it to generations of Americans and their families to help find treatments that could lead to an improved quality of life. I urge my colleagues in the Senate to pass the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act.